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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7343
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RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0951
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1148
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, EUR/SCE
NSC FOR BRAUN
USUN FOR DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI
EUR/ACE FOR DMAYHEW

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KCRM](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [YI](#) [UNMIK](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#)
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SUBJECT: KOSOVO ALBANIANS COMMEMORATE KOSOVO'S NEW MISSING
PERSONS DAY

REF: A. 03 PRISTINA 1823

[1](#)B. 06 PRISTINA 282

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Kosovo government officially recognized April 27 as Missing Persons Day. By changing the date from the internationally-observed August 30 to the anniversary of one of the largest massacres of Kosovo Albanians in 1999, the government scored some unnecessary PR points against Belgrade but may have complicated the actual task of a final accounting of the missing. The main commemoration took place in Meja, where Kosovo Albanians buried 22 Muslim and Catholic victims of that massacre. Thousands of people participated in the event and paid their respects to the families of the victims. PM Ceku addressed the crowd, saying that Serbia should apologize for the deaths that occurred during the war. This change in focus is unfortunate since it does nothing substantive to find the missing; it turns the wrenching issues of missing persons and other atrocities into a bludgeon with which to make political points. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Starting in 2000, Kosovo Albanians have held annual commemorations on April 27 in a large field outside Meja (Gjakove/Djakovica municipality, in southwestern Kosovo). The field marks the site where over 350 Kosovo Albanians went missing during one of the largest massacres of the 1999 conflict. In the early years the commemorations were for honoring and remembering the victims. Most of the bodies were later found in mass graves in Serbia, and over time they have slowly been identified and repatriated. The field has been transformed into a cemetery and the annual commemorations turned into burials (reftels). Gjakove has a mixed Kosovo Albanian Catholic and Muslim population, and this cemetery is the only one in Kosovo where Catholics and Muslims are buried side by side.

13. (SBU) In February 2007, the Kosovo Assembly voted to officially designate April 27 Kosovo Missing Persons Day. Previously, Kosovo commemorated the International Day of Missing Persons on August 30. This year on April 27, members of the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) buried 22 Muslim and Catholic Kosovo Albanian victims of the 1999 Meja massacre. Thousands of Kosovo Albanians participated in the event, holding their right hands over their hearts as they slowly filed past the weeping family members, who stood near the open graves with pictures of their loved ones. It was a warm spring day, and as Kosovo Protection Corps members brought the simple wooden coffins one by one onto the field, each draped with a red Albanian flag, at least ten people were overcome with heat and grief and had to be whisked away on stretchers by the Red Cross.

14. (SBU) Kosovo Prime Minister Agim Ceku addressed the crowd, saying that Serbia can never move forward until it distances itself from the past. He added that Serbia should apologize for the deaths that occurred in Kosovo and elsewhere. During a subsequent speech, a representative of the family member associations singled out Valerie Brasey, director of UNMIK's Office of Missing Persons and Forensics (OMPF), for special thanks for the work OMPF has done to return these and other victims to their families.

15. (SBU) COMMENT. Progress on resolving the fate of Kosovo's missing remains slow, and family members are understandably frustrated. However, the government's changing of International Missing Persons day to the anniversary of a particularly horrific massacre does nothing substantive to find the missing, and actually sets back efforts at reconciliation between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs. Our ongoing policy approach will be to act on the basis of our desire to see justice done while at the same time

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disassociating ourselves from efforts -- irresistible for most Kosovars -- to use past injustices as grounds for current and future ones. END COMMENT.
KAIDANOW